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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 001573

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS FROM THE SOUTH

REF: A. LAGOS 1293 B. LAGOS 1549

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reason 1.4 (d).

[11.](#) (C) Summary. The Southern Nigerian political scene remains volatile. Three demonstrations in Nigeria in recent weeks have resulted in between four and ten deaths. Another deputy governor has been impeached; the governor of Abia State is embroiled in a bitter political battle with the President; and internal power struggles threaten to split the Imo State chapter of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). End Summary.

NATIONAL SNAPSHOTS: Protest Rallies Largely Ineffective;
PDP Registration Flounders

[12.](#) (U) Between September 17 and 29, the Labor and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) conducted marches and rallies in nine cities to protest increased fuel prices. The rallies were larger than expected, attracting as many as 50,000 protestors in both Lagos and Kano. The GON responded by offering to freeze prices until the end of 2006 and to lower prices if and when market forces allow.

[13.](#) (U) Chima Ubani, head of Nigeria's most respected human rights group, the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), and a newspaper editor were killed in a car accident while returning to Abuja from the September 21 rally in Maiduguri. Rumors of GON connivance in the accident are afloat, but thus far no evidence points to foul play, only to substandard roads, poorly maintained vehicles, and ill-trained drivers.

[14.](#) (C) The series of rallies concluded September 29 in Abuja, where protestors lobbed trash and sticks at Malam Nasir El-Rufai, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory. NLC President Oshiomhole had to intervene, and the GON ultimately thanked the NLC for conducting relatively peaceful rallies. (Comment: The NLC had hoped the rallies would culminate in a swell of popular support for a possible strike against the fuel price increase. However, by the time these rallies were held, the general public was resigned to the price increase and had little stomach to enlist in a strike against what already seemed a fait accompli. End Comment.)

[15.](#) (U) Local branches of the PDP began issuing registration cards to members, but the process resulted in internecine turmoil in many states. Cards were too scarce for all, and those controlling the process favored their factional partisans when distributing the cards. In a statement to the press, a Lagos State PDP boss described the membership card shortage as a deliberate strategy by the pro-Obasanjo National Executive to retake party structure from the governors. Protest petitions in no fewer than six states forced the national PDP to form committees to monitor the registration, to ensure that everyone who wished to register with the party could do so. One person reportedly died in Delta State as a result of a registration card dispute.

SOUTH-WEST SNAPSHOT: Soldiers fight Police in Lagos;
Ekiti Deputy Governor impeached

[16.](#) (U) On October 5 an argument between a soldier and a policeman on a Lagos bus cascaded into widespread violence in the Surulere section of the city, claiming three lives and leaving ten wounded (ref B). While police and soldiers were attacking each other and hapless civilians who got in the way, local thugs were only too happy to join the fray, adding to the chaos. Several vehicles and shops were destroyed, and a police station nearly burned down. Lagos State Governor Tinubu has convened daily emergency security council meetings with army and police heads to investigate the matter. Meanwhile, police sources are reporting occasional flare-ups with soldiers by way of reprisal, none yet fatal. (Comment. This is the latest and most spectacular flare-up in a long standing rivalry in Lagos between the police and army. The relationship between the two has been strained in Lagos for some time. With the rank and file of both feeling the pinch of generalized economic hardship and with neither uniform viewed with respect by most Lagosians, the possibility of other flare-ups is real. That the police and army can be as much a catalyst of unrest as they can be a brake against it demonstrates the fragile security situation that

characterizes many parts of Lagos. End Comment.)

17. (C) In Ekiti State, Abiodun Aluko, the Deputy Governor, was impeached September 15 on sixteen counts of disloyalty and gross misconduct. In the meantime, nineteen members of the State's House of Representatives, including Speaker Friday Aderemi, were questioned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for allegedly taking bribes of two million naira (about \$15,000) each from Ekiti Governor Ayo Fayose. An NGO, Ekiti Justice & Equity Movement, presented these bribery charges to the EFCC. The NGO provided bank statements and other documents demonstrating the legislators had used official funds for personal expenses, including a sports car. (Comment. That Ekiti's Deputy Governor was given the pink slip may be further evidence that President Obasanjo has wrested power in the PDP from Vice-President Atiku's machine. For instance, a pro-Obasanjo governor like Ekiti's Fayose found it relatively easy to remove his "disloyal" deputy. In Akwa Ibom, pro-Atiku Governor Victor Attah was stopped in his tracks by the PDP National Secretary when he tried to boot his second-in-command. End Comment.)

SOUTH-SOUTH SNAPSHOT: Niger Delta Tensions Breed Desperate Acts

18. (U) The South-South remains tense but largely quiet. The detentions of regional leaders - Bayelsa State Governor Alamieyeseigha in Britain for money laundering, followed by Dokubo-Asari's arrest for treason - instigated angry demonstrations by militants in the South and has much of the population in a state of suspense. Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) has announced a ceasefire, and other Ijaw groups have been quiet, apparently awaiting further government action in Asari's case.

19. (C) On October 6, Dokubo-Asari's lawyer and Ledum Mitee, President of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), were "invited" to Abuja and questioned about issues relating to Asari's activities. Mitee was later released for lack of evidence connecting him to Asari. Asari's treason trial was scheduled to begin October 7. In Bayelsa, the State Speaker of the House was dismissed and brought up on charges before the EFCC. (Comment. Reportedly, Abuja is pressing the State Assembly to impeach Governor Alamieyeseigha, and the Speaker's demise may be related to his reticence in initiating proceedings against his political mentor. End Comment.)

SOUTH-EAST SNAPSHOT: MASSOB riots claim at least six lives; Abia Governor exchanges corruption charges with OBJ; Imo State PDP rips apart

10. (U) The Igbo secessionist group Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) held protests in September in four southern states, Imo, Anambra, Cross River and Delta. The protests were organized in response to perceived police mistreatment of MASSOB leader Ralph Uwazurike, who is currently in hiding. Protestors clashed with police in Anambra State, and as many as six people were reported dead. Police arrested several of the protestors, and MASSOB sources claim that they are still in custody.

11. (C) Abia State Governor Orji Kalu wrote a letter to President Obasanjo, accusing him of corruption and abuse of office. He categorized Obasanjo's reform campaign as "window dressing" for a scheme to eliminate political rivals. Obasanjo responded by turning the letter over to the EFCC and demanding an investigation. Kalu refused the EFCC's summons request to provide evidence to corroborate the accusation, asserting that the EFCC could not conduct an unbiased investigation since it reported directly to the President. Kalu called for a special prosecutor. At the same time, Kalu's former Deputy Governor Eyinnaya Abaribe submitted a petition to the EFCC accusing the Governor of misappropriation of state funds and embezzlement. (Comment. This is the latest round in the President's long-standing battle with Kalu. In this particular round, each appeared to call the other's bluff. While nothing happened this time, we can expect other encounters in the near future. End Comment.)

12. (U) In a move to weaken pro-Atiku governor Udenwa, the National Working Council (NWC) of the PDP dissolved the Imo State chapter's Executive Committee, following alleged irregularities in the party's local council primaries. The National Council then installed a "caretaker" committee to run the party in the state. The Imo PDP immediately split into two factions: one consisting of Abuja-based Imo politicians and supportive of the new committee; the other consisting of Governor Achike Udenwa's supporters. Udenwa persists in demanding the immediate dissolution of the "caretaker" committee, but no resolution has yet been made.

Comment

113. (U) Politics in Southern Nigeria continue to steam as 2007 elections approach. With the EFCC now on the scene arresting and questioning scores of officials throughout the South and with the impending trials of Asari and Governor Alamieyeseigha, the political competition promises to be more intense than the elections in 1999 or 2003. The stakes are higher. Now it appears to many that if one is on the losing side, not only will political dreams be dashed but one might get a "go-to-jail" card. Thus, we will continue to see more hardball politics in Southern Nigeria. End Comment.

114. This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BROWNE